

# COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

March 2, 2006

## San Francisco Bay Area Upland Habitat Goals Report Phase I

File No. 06-004

Project Manager: Ann Buell

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to one hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000) to Greenbelt Alliance to complete Phase I of the *San Francisco Bay Area Upland Habitat Goals Report*, under the direction of the Bay Area Open Space Council.

**LOCATION:** All nine San Francisco Bay Area counties (San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Alameda, Contra Costa, Solano, Napa, Sonoma, Marin) (Exhibit 1).

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** San Francisco Bay Area

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### **EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: Map of the San Francisco Bay Area

Exhibit 2: Letters of Support

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### **RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31000 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000) to Greenbelt Alliance to develop Phase I of the *San Francisco Bay Area Upland Habitat Goals* report, subject to the condition that prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds:

1. Greenbelt Alliance shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer a detailed work program, budget and schedule; and the names and qualifications of any contractors and subcontractors that it intends to employ.
2. The Conservancy has received fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) in matching funds for this project from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The *San Francisco Bay Area Upland Habitat Goals* project is consistent with the purposes and criteria set forth in Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31165 regarding the Conservancy's mandate to address the resource and recreation goals of the San Francisco Bay Area, and with the authority of the Conservancy under Public Resources Code Section 31111 to award grants to non-profit organizations for these purposes.
2. The *San Francisco Bay Area Upland Habitat Goals* project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. Greenbelt Alliance is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code, whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code.”

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### PROJECT SUMMARY:

Staff requests authorization to disburse up to \$150,000 to Greenbelt Alliance to develop Phase I of the *San Francisco Bay Area Upland Habitat Goals Report (Upland Habitat Goals)*. Of this dollar amount, fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) would originate in a grant from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation to the Conservancy for use in this project. The *Upland Habitat Goals* report will be a conservation plan recommending types, acreage, and configuration of habitats needed to maintain regional biodiversity. The report will be a decision-support tool that Conservancy staff and others will use to prioritize funding and project development for the acquisition, preservation, and enhancement of upland habitat and riparian corridors in the nine-county Bay Area. Phase I, which will take about one year to complete, will include analysis and integration of existing data, peer-reviewed identification of conservation targets and methodology, an initial analysis of plant community protection in the San Francisco Bay Area, and a web page describing the project and making data layers available to the public. Greenbelt Alliance will produce briefing papers on the work products produced in Phase I so that the results may be immediately used while the second (final) phase is underway.

Greenbelt Alliance will administer this project under the direction of the Bay Area Open Space Council (BAOSC). The BAOSC will lead the *Upland Habitat Goals* project using a science-based process and the scope of work developed with a 2004 grant from the Coastal Conservancy (see Project History). Creation of the report will be approached in two phases because funding to carry out all the details of the scope of work is not yet available. It is nonetheless important to begin the analysis for this report now because of the unrelenting pressure for residential development in many of the most biologically significant upland habitat areas of the San Francisco Bay Area. Ironically, the challenge of securing funding for this project underscores the need to have in hand a strategic plan for spending those funds that do become available for resource protection in the nine-county Bay Area.

The approach for the *Upland Habitat Goals* project is to bring together scientists and resource managers representing all or the majority of the agencies and organizations responsible for protecting, restoring, and enhancing Bay Area upland habitats to recommend habitat goals. Conservancy staff will co-chair a steering committee of approximately 25 members. Experts

from the fields of botany, wildlife, and mapping and data analysis will complement the expertise on the steering committee as it begins the process of setting goals for the conservation of regional biological diversity. This approach is modeled after several similar reports around the country, including the *San Francisco Baylands Ecosystem Goals* report. Completed in 1999 and focused on wetlands at the Bay's edge, the *San Francisco Baylands Ecosystem Goals* report has contributed to the protection of 36,000 acres of wetlands and attracted significant funding for implementation of acquisition, protection, and restoration projects (See, for example, Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002 (Proposition 50), Water Code Section 79572(a)(1)).

The *Upland Habitat Goals* report will be designed to be a guide for action and project implementation. This design acknowledges that scientists and conservation practitioners are not always in agreement about what is most important to protect, or how to evaluate habitats. The project is thus structured to develop goals based on a broad-based assessment of what is important, why it is important, where the threats are, and how those threats can most effectively be addressed.

There are numerous potential audiences and users of the *Upland Habitat Goals* report: funding agencies, regulatory agencies, private foundations and major donors, implementing agencies and organizations, and policy makers and the public (Exhibit 2). In the second phase, peer review and public involvement will increase. The report to be completed in Phase II will be structured to identify the core areas, linkages, compatible uses, rare species, and ecological processes and functions needed to sustain diverse and healthy communities of plants, fish, and wildlife within the nine-county Bay Area.

The BAOSC is a collaboration of more than 50 public and non-profit land management agencies and organizations, dedicated to providing regional leadership and expertise for the preservation and stewardship of important open spaces in and around the cities of the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. As a basic tenet of its mission, the BAOSC supports research and education to improve the planning and conservation of land, and works actively to maintain and improve communication among conservation organizations. With a proven track record of accomplishing this mission, the BAOSC is well suited to lead this project. Greenbelt Alliance is equally qualified to administer the project. It is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving a greenbelt of open space in the San Francisco Bay Area using smart growth tools.

**Project History:** As development pressure continues in the San Francisco Bay Area, the need to work toward the preservation of the region's remaining biodiversity remains high. The Bay Area conservation community needs but does not have a scientific vision for a network of protected lands that will preserve and even enhance the biological diversity of the region. A document presenting and defending this vision would allow conservation practitioners to assess a particular conservation project's contribution toward this goal. Currently, members of the Bay Area Open Space Council and other conservation practitioners make project selection decisions based on the best available biological information, which may have been developed for the entity's jurisdiction without taking the larger regional perspective into consideration.

At the Spotlight on Conservation Workshop held by the State's Legacy Project for the San Francisco Bay Area in October, 2002, participants from a broad cross-section of agencies and organizations developed criteria for terrestrial biodiversity conservation. Highest priority criteria centered on sufficient area for natural processes and species diversity, rare and endangered

species, representative natural communities, and landscape linkages. That workshop resulted in an interagency agreement with the Resources Agency, which gave the Conservancy \$16,500 to grant to Greenbelt Alliance (January 2004) to develop the scope of work for the *Upland Habitat Goals* project. Since that time, \$205,700 has been spent on project and base map development, of which approximately \$60,000 came from a separate Conservancy grant to Greenbelt Alliance in 2004 and \$25,000 from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation to Greenbelt Alliance in 2005.

As the BAOSC was preparing to take the next steps in this project, the Conservancy took the lead in developing the Bay Area Watershed Plan (Watershed Plan), which will contain resource and habitat directives for the region. The Conservancy is now receiving a Proposition 50 grant ("Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Act of 2002") to further develop the Watershed Plan, to develop a Flood Protection and Stormwater Management Plan, and to fold these components into an Integrated Regional Watershed Management Plan, which is largely focused on developing recommendations for multi-objective projects encompassing habitat restoration, stormwater management, flood protection, water supply, water quality, and wastewater treatment. Some of the data sets compiled for the Watershed Plan are expected to be useful to the *Upland Habitat Goals* project, so the *Upland Habitat Goals* project was put on hold while the Watershed Plan got underway and also while the BAOSC was making the transition to a new director. The sharing of datasets between these two projects should help manage costs and possible duplication of efforts.

#### **PROJECT FINANCING:**

Coastal Conservancy	\$100,000
Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation	<u>50,000</u>
<b>Total Project Cost</b>	<b>\$150,000</b>

The Conservancy's contribution for the proposed project, \$100,000, is expected to come from the Conservancy's FY 2003/2004 appropriation from the "California Clean Water, Clean Air, Safe Neighborhood Parks and Coastal Protection Act of 2002" (Proposition 40) for the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program. This portion of the authorization is consistent with the funding source because the project will serve to identify, evaluate, interpret, and document resource data and information relevant to the establishment of goals and guidance for the preservation of upland habitat in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The project is also appropriate for funding priority under Proposition 40 because it includes a commitment of matching funds. One-third of the total project funding, \$50,000, comes from a grant from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation to the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program for use in this project. The Moore Foundation grant stipulates that the grant money be used for this proposed project.

#### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

The Conservancy is authorized under Section 31111 of the Public Resources Code to fund and undertake plans and feasibility studies, and to award grants to nonprofit organizations for these purposes, in order to implement Division 21. The proposed grant to Greenbelt Alliance would

assist the nonprofit organization and its collaborators as they analyze upland habitat needs for the San Francisco Bay Area so that acquisition and enhancement projects are well selected.

This project would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31164, to address resource and recreational goals in the San Francisco Bay Area. The proposed authorization will assist the Conservancy and its project partners in meeting these goals by facilitating the identification of significant uplands in the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program area.

Consistent with Section 31163(c), the Conservancy will be supporting public/private partnerships in the San Francisco Bay Area.

This project is appropriate for prioritization under the selection criteria set forth in Section 31163(d) in that (1) it is multijurisdictional, involving all nine Bay Area counties, (2) it can be implemented in a timely way because the Greenbelt Alliance/Bay Area Open Space Council and its members are ready to begin work, and 3) it includes matching funds from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation.

#### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 9 Objective A** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, the proposed project will identify upland and riparian habitat conservation targets for the San Francisco Bay Area through data analysis and expansion and updating of GIS databases for the region.

#### **CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

##### **Required Criteria**

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** This project is supported by many legislators and the membership of the Bay Area Open Space Council, a consortium of more than 50 land conservation agencies and organizations (Exhibit 2).
4. **Location:** The proposed project area is upland habitat, including riparian corridors, of the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area.
5. **Need:** Dozens of resource professionals from around the San Francisco Bay Area will donate their time to develop this report, but staff at the Bay Area Open Space Council need funding to lead the effort in a timely way.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** In creating the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program, the legislature designated the San Francisco Bay Area as an area of statewide concern.

Further, there are a number of plant communities that have disappeared from much of their statewide range but which remain in small populations in the Bay Area. Such plant communities are possible targets for conservation.

**Additional Criteria**

7. **Urgency:** The threat of development in upland areas around the San Francisco is always present. In the November 2005 special election, urban limit lines in two Contra Costa cities were moved to make way for more development. This proposed project may help guide future land protection and even future funding measures.
8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** The *San Francisco Bay Area Upland Habitat Goals Report* may not only guide land-protection decisions but also legislative funding decisions as happened with the Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals project (1999) for wetlands.
9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
12. **Readiness:** The scope of work is already in place for this project.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See “Project History” above.
15. **Cooperation:** The steering committee for this project and the expected members of focus groups represent a broad array of public agencies and non-profit groups, all of whom are interested in the guidance this document will provide.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:** As a planning activity for possible future actions that have not been approved, adopted, or funded, this project is categorically exempt from California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review under 14 California Code of Regulations Section 15262. Similarly, the project is statutorily exempt from CEQA review under Section 15306, which exempts basic data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.